

Co-Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members Senator Berthel and Representative McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Callie Gale Heilmann and I am the President & Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now and a parent in the Bridgeport Public School system. I am testifying in support of SB 948 and in opposition to Governor Lamont's proposed education budget. In addition to sending my children to Bridgeport Public Schools, I am also a third generation Harfordite, the third generation in my family to go to Hartford Public High School, and a proud supporter of public schools.

However, I also understand the promise and purpose of the Charter School movement, as my aunt was part of the staff that opened Breakthrough Charter in Hartford in the early 90s. The promise and purpose was always to provide innovative approaches to education that met the needs of students, particularly those that Connecticut's public education system - and the state legislature - kept neglecting.

Leveraging private dollars, these education reformers saw a way to create opportunities in a state that many of us know is one of the most racist states in the entire country. And the outcome of that movement is - sometimes it has worked, and often times it hasn't. And that is because Charters schools - and many "reform" policies over the last 20 years - ultimately did not solve for what is at the root and heart of all the passionate activism and advocacy - our state's deeply entrenched, hyper local system of school segregation. And the fights over charter vs public kept good people and parents fighting among each other and not attacking the root causes - and the winners are and continue to be our state's predominantly white, wealthy communities

In Bridgeport, for example although we have many charter schools, with the decline of manufacturing, came white flight and fortified housing discrimination in Fairfield County. Bridgeport's public education system crumbled under the competing pressures and strained tax dollars, and students have been left dramatically underserved for decades. And so although heavily taxed at the highest mill rates in the entire state, property-poor Bridgeport is unable to keep up with the demands of its high-need student population - and has made millions of dollars of drastic cuts since I moved there in 2013.

As progressives who abhor racism and racial segregation - who should always have been united in one message - are as I am listening today, continue to be fractured. I urge organizations and advocates in this space to gather to heal and end these divides. My hope is that we all can come together united under one common vision - and that is to **build a new system in this state that creates public high-quality, equitably-financed, and racially and economically integrated schools for all children in Connecticut that meet students' needs.**

The initial CJEF ruling was a moment of promise for Connecticut. But our state Supreme Court ruled otherwise. Which has left that burden up to the legislature. And so it is upon you to see through the noise and to ask yourselves every time a piece of legislation comes across your committee - how does this seek to end the entrenched racial and economic segregation within our state's education system? Does this meet the needs of students? And does it sustain the commitment and promise of our multiracial democracy, which is that we are very publicly "in this together."

In order to end this ever-evolving racist system that guarantees the outcome of deep racial disparities in our state, we must enact anti-racist laws and policies in Connecticut. And anti-racist laws and policies are ones that put resources, support, and guaranteed rights in place to END racial and economic segregation in our state once and for all.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and leadership on this issue.

[Callie Gale Heilmann](#), Bridgeport Generation Now